

What is now Seahurst Park was once used by Native Americans for fishing and clam-gathering. Recent years have seen the revival of a salmon run on one of the creeks trickling down from the highlands through the Park to the Sound, preserving a delicate cycle that is older than humanity itself. . . .

Then came the white man. The U.S. Congress passed the Donation Act of 1850, entitling Washington's earliest "white and mixed-blood settlers" to free land. This culminated in the Homestead Act of 1862, which provided that any person over 21, or who was head of a family and was either a citizen or an alien who intended to become a citizen, could obtain 160 acres of public land if he lived on the land for five years and improved it. The Act also allowed a person to substitute the payment of \$1.25 an acre in lieu of the five-year requirement. The Surveyor General's office established a principal meridian and base line surveyed at six-mile intervals, creating townships of 36 sections, each a mile square, the basis for the legal description.

Many people took advantage of the act to obtain land in what would become Burien. The Homestead Act was supposed to attract settlers to the west by providing them with land for farms and new homes. But only a fraction of the land was actually settled by true homesteaders. The Act of 1862 was modified in 1873, allowing people to acquire 320 acres, but the chief beneficiaries were speculators. (Wonderful World of Woods and Water: A History of Normandy Park, Normandy Park Historical Committee, Helen Kludt et al, p. 2)

This appears to be the case with the original purchasers of Seahurst Park. White "homesteaders," enticed more by the area's timber than by any desire to own waterfront property or dig for clams, began laying claim to the area as early as the 1860s. On May 15, 1869, three enterprising men, A.F. Pope, W.C. Talbot, and Cyrus Walker, purchased what is most of today's Seahurst Park. (*document 1553; also, map showing names of original homesteaders from King Co. Archives, Wonderful World of Woods . . .*). By 1880 (census) Cyrus Walker, age 52 and still single, was a lumber mill company manager on the Kitsap Peninsula. (Salmon Creek Neighborhood Plan, Oct. 2004, p. 8) (Were logs from Seahurst Park rafted to the Pope & Talbot mill in Port Gamble, or to Walker's mill?)

In 1853 Captain William C. Talbot (1816-1881) of East Machias, Maine established a steam sawmill as the Puget Mill Co. at Port Gamble on Hood Canal. The mill operated continuously for 142 years--longer than any other in the U.S.--from 1853 to 1995. Talbot's main partner was Andrew J. Pope (1820-1878), with whom he had imported and sold lumber in San Francisco. When they learned of Puget Sound's vast timber resources, they returned home to Maine for supplies and workers (one of whom was Cyrus Walker). They left for the Pacific Coast via Cape Horn in two small sailing ships, the voyage lasting nearly six months. Within a week of landing equipment and supplies, their mill (with the help of Josiah Keller, another partner) was producing lumber. ("Captain William Talbot . . ." HistoryLink.org Essay 5486)

Although diversified today, Pope and Talbot was a major forest products enterprise in Western Washington throughout the 20th century. It thus seems likely that the owners of

such a concern would have sought out large tracts of timber close to tidewater--either for their own mills or to sell to others--such as their "homesteading" in 1869 of present-day Seahurst Park.

Seahurst Park and other local beaches were popular picnic spots in the early 1900s. Charles Hughes was born in 1895 on his parents' farm near what is today downtown Burien. After the berries were picked and the hay gathered in, his folks would "hitch old Dobbin to the spring wagon" and take the kids to the beach. "No one lived from Salmon Creek (on the beach) to Three Tree Point," so campsites were plentiful. All they brought with them for food was a bag of potatoes and some flour. They picked wild berries, dug clams and caught fish from rafts fashioned from the plentiful driftwood, logs and boards. (Our Burien, p. 53)

Jack Stokes, who moved to Seahurst from Seattle as a boy in 1914, fished down Stearns Creek where Seahurst Park is today. (Our Burien excerpt)

In 1915 the Seahurst Land Company owned 200 acres of land from 16th S.W. to Puget Sound, north of S.W. 152nd Street. The company's president was C.W. Keisel; the superintendent was a Mr. Harbaugh. This parcel contained 12 to 14 springs, some of them in present-day Seahurst Park. Pumps were installed at S.W. 142nd Street and 21st Ave. S.W. The pumps were used to get the water into small tanks.

No road led to the tanks, just paths and trails. Keisel sold his enterprise to Marshall W. Brown and J.F. Busch of Seattle, but Harbaugh remained on as superintendent. World War Two brought about 100 homes to the area served by the springs. The increased demand led to larger and newer pumps and larger tanks, which were moved to S.W. 146th Street. The water, tested once a month, was "always 100% pure." In 1947 there were 30 meters.

Harbaugh, who lived at 15825 Maplewild Drive, knew and liked all of his customers well. ("Seahurst Water Has Long History," Highline Times, Dec. 18, 1947, p. 9) At least one of the springs, and the possible remains of a pumping station, can be found in the southern portion of Seahurst Park.

In the early 1900s, the Park area became a private estate (the Fox estate), and was established as a park in 1975. It's also known as Ed Munro Park, after the state legislator who helped establish it. (Seattle Times article by Kristin Jackson, July 8, 2004) Burien resident Pam Harper recalls walking along the beach as a girl from Three Tree Point to the Fox family estate, where they had a merry-go-round. Robert Fox (one of the Fox children), she believes, later had the Ford dealership on 146th and First Avenue South. (Telephone interview with Pam Harper, August 9th, 2007)

One of the members of the King County Parks Board (appointed by Commissioner Ed Munro) was Fred Metzler, son of White Center pioneers Sam and Lucretia Metzler. Fred served 10 years, until the Park Board was eliminated by the new county charter. He played a key role in developing parks in the Highline District, including Ed Munro Seahurst Park. Metzler operated a successful insurance business in White Center for

many years. (White Center Remembers, p. 52)

Sometime in the 1950s or 1960s, Howie Gwinn--with some backing from John Ellison, Lee Kennett and a few others--launched a stupendous project: purchase and complete development of what is now the Hurstwood community. Gwinn lived on the south shore of Lake Burien, on a cul-de-sac he had helped plan and develop. Buying a bulldozer and hiring an operator, he sculpted the whole project over a period of years out of land purchased from the Pope & Talbot logging firm. He was spared an even bigger project when at the last minute King county parks, through Commissioner Ed Munro, decided to acquire a bit (all) of his waterfront, plus the adjoining property for a total of 2,000+ feet. (Paul Harper, Lake Burien Reflections, www.lakeburien.com)

Ed Munro played a key role in the destiny of Burien. When County Commissioner Bill Sears died in office, Jerry Robinson, publisher of the White Center News (and later the Highline Times) launched a campaign to appoint Munro to Sears' unexpired term. As County Commissioner, Munro bought Seahurst Park and brought other improvements to South End parks and playfields.

"When Dottie Harper got the big idea to have the county buy the old Fox estate between White Center and Burien on Puget Sound," Robinson recalls, "she was told the county had no money. So she called Norm Ackley, White Center attorney. . . . Norm knew Ed and I were close friends so he asked me to go to bat for Dottie.

I arranged for Norm, Ed and I to cruise the waterfront so he could see what the property looked like from the water. Setting out from Three Tree Point in Norm's eight-foot dinghy with a five-horse outboard, we began our tour. Even though the waves lapped over the minimal freeboard and we all got wet feet, Ed, after seeing the marvelous sandy, driftwood-strewn stretch of beach, was visibly impressed, and vocal. He found the money to buy it by selling the Burien Fieldhouse site to (now defunct) Westside Federal Bank for a headquarters. Bid Fitchett and Gil Duffy moved the old fieldhouse over to Ruth School on Lake Burien. Ed also found money for Moshier Park next to Highline High School." (Listen to Your Father: The Life Adventure of Jerry Robinson, 1995, pp. 94-95)

In 1962 a \$2 million bond proposal passed by the King County Commissioners included funds for land acquisition of Ed Munro Seahurst Park. Ed Munro served as a King County Commissioner from April, 1958 until 1969. In 1968 a 23-acre addition to Seahurst Park, including 235 feet of waterfront, was made possible when King County voters approved Proposition 6, a Forward Thrust Parks and Recreation bond. \$1.125 million was allotted for the addition, \$272,000 for facilities improvements and \$166,000 for boat launching ramps (which were never built). (History of King County's Park, Recreation and Open Space System, Caroline Tobin, March, 1992; and HistoryLink.org website)

By 1967 the Highline School District was interested in establishing a marine vocational training program at Seahurst Park. Leading this effort were superintendent Carl Jensen, who had been involved in an earlier effort to turn a surplus Navy vessel (the "J.T.") into a maritime training program; Dr. Robert Sealey, assistant superintendent, who was involved in the district's existing Occupational Skills program; Dr. Ben Yormark, the

district's director of Vocational Education; Hugh Albrecht, site director; and Chuck Hardy, science coordinator for the district and a leader in innovative science teaching and environmental education.

An advisory committee made up of representatives from marine-related businesses, government agencies and education was formed in the spring of 1968. A study of present and future employment needs indicated opportunities for trained employees. It was therefore decided to offer a program for high school seniors as an extension of the new Occupational Skills Center, a cooperative venture of the Federal Way, South Central and Highline School Districts. At that time, OSC's initial four programs—plastics, medical assistants, food services and power sewing—were housed in the old vacant Foster High School Building.

A waterfront site was needed for the marine program. This was facilitated mainly via an existing relationship between the Highline School District and King County, through a series of cooperative ventures sharing adjacent school and park sites. Highline had also initiated the plan for placing Forward Thrust swimming pools on school sites by deeding a small plot to the county for that purpose. A similar request for a small tract in the newly acquired and not fully developed Seahurst Park was negotiated, with certain stipulations to protect public use.

On-site instructor and director Lauren Rice guided the enterprise through its various stages for 23 years, and was one of the reasons for its success. He was supported by Hugh Albrecht from 1968 until his retirement in 1991. While administered by Highline District personnel, this program, like OSC, was funded and supported by South Central and Federal Way School Districts as well.

By April 1968 the new maritime program had secured approval and Rice employed as on-site instructor. A curriculum was developed and materials and equipment ordered for a September start. King County had purchased the Fox estate on Seahurst Beach for development as a regional waterfront park. A one-year lease was first arranged for use of the former Fox guest house.

Two half-day classes of 15 students each made up the first year's enrollment. Students came from all private and public high schools within the three cooperating districts. There was much to be done, including construction of an all-weather trail from the parking lot; unpacking and installing equipment, tools and materials; building a 200-gallon aquarium out of plywood; installing a 600-foot pipeline with pump for a saltwater system for all tide levels; and adapting the former swimming pool for use as a huge aquarium.

King County, meanwhile, proceeded with plans to develop Seahurst Park and raze the guest house in use by the maritime program. A 99-year lease was therefore arranged for an adjacent lot on which to build a new lab building. Architect Ralph Burkhart was picked to work with staff to design a new Marine Technology Lab. Construction contracts were coordinated with the new OSC facility being built near Sea-Tac airport. The three districts shared in the funding on a proportional basis related to enrollment.

The new Marine Technology Lab, consisting of 5,000 square feet of instructional space and storage area on two floor levels, was occupied in 1972. A unique feature was the open aquarium and hatchery water systems. The County also agreed to build a salmon ladder and concrete-lined holding and rearing pond in the adjacent small stream.

The Marine Tech program at Seahurst Park has succeeded in its two main goals: to prepare students for jobs in marine-related occupations, and prepare them for additional career advancement. Marine Tech grads work all over the world for such entities as METRO, municipalities, Port of Seattle, state Departments of Fisheries, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Navy, EPA and for non-governmental employers as well.

The salmon hatchery program has gradually increased in production with the new facility and streamwater system. Up to 300 3-year-old coho salmon return each fall to the stream of their origin—the small Marine Tech ladder and holding pond—as a result of the prior release of up to 10,000 year-and-a-half-old smolts. (I have personally witnessed this spectacle at the creek in Seahurst Park and it is truly awesome). (Highline School District Chronicle, pp. 85-101)

Former Highline School District Superintendent Carl Jensen had these recollections: The marine technology program, initiated in 1968, required a waterfront site on Puget Sound to be effective. Because of the District's long record of cooperation with King County in joint use of school sites, an approach was made to obtain a plot at Seahurst Park for a marine technology facility. With this background of cooperative projects, the county agreed to deeding a plot in Seahurst Park to the District for a marine technology building. It was stipulated that the public would have some access to it—portholes through which several aquaria could be viewed were included in the outside of the building.

The beach park site included the former Beck and later the Fox family home and the small swimming pool. By reorganizing of partitions, this house became the base for a marine technology program from 1968 through 1972, when a new two-story building was completed. ("The History of the Development of OSC," Carl Jensen, Highline Historical Society News, July 2007, pp. 4-6)

King County's Forward Thrust program of the late 1960s included plans for increased development of Seahurst Park, including an 8-lane boat launching ramp, expanded parking lot, seawall, breakwater, raised picnic areas and other improvements. Environmentalists, however, were concerned about the scope and impact of these projects. In December 1970 King County Executive John Spellman appointed an ecology team comprised of University of Washington faculty to conduct a four-month review of the ecological effects of development. Among the team's findings were that the boat ramp be scaled down, the parking lot shortened, the sea wall reduced and the breakwater be replaced with a more subtle, offshore groin. ("Ecologists recommend Seahurst Park boat launch, sea wall be reduced," Highline Times, June 16, 1971.)

Today Seahurst Park--Burien's "Crown Jewel"--contains much open space and many natural features such as streams, wetlands and Puget Sound shoreline. The park also includes a marine technology facility, miles of trails and recreational structures. Volunteer naturalists from the King County Beach Naturalist program make regularly

scheduled visits to Seahurst Park to answer questions about marine plants and animals. (Jackson article)

With its miles of wooded trails and sparkling beaches, Seahurst Park is a delightful place to go walking. Originally, however, plans called for a huge parking lot--which would have wiped out most of the driftwood-strewn beach--to provide a paved parking space for over a hundred boat trailers, and a launching facility with several lanes. As Dr. Frank (Fred?) Hazeltine remembers, "This plan was successfully opposed by the adjacent neighbors, the Sierra Club and the League of Women Voters. After they were sued in court, the King County Commissioners changed the plans to create the family recreation facility that it is today. . . ." (Frank Hazeltine Oral History, Highline Historical Society Website.)

In 1989 King County acquired 92 acres adjoining Seahurst Park to the north. This was known as the Salmon Creek Addition. "This was rescued from developers," Hazeltine remembers, "when the money to purchase it became part of a King County bond issue. The hearing was packed with people favoring the purchase where I submitted my checklist of 65 different bird species I had seen while walking the trails on this property. . . ." (Hazeltine Oral History).

Seahurst Park was a King County park until 1993, when ownership and management were transitioned to the new city of Burien, which was to have taken full control in 1997. However, Seahurst Park was removed from the transitional agreement while differences regarding designation of type of park were ironed out. The City viewed the Park as regional, which would require continued county maintenance, while the County referred to it as a community park. (A Review of Parks and Recreation Services in the City of Burien, Sue Barnes Blazak, 1994)

The beach itself is about 2,000 feet long. The upper beach has been stabilized with a seawall for most of its length. The upper beach was modified in the early- to mid-1990s through the placement of large logs, plantings of native vegetation and chunks of rip-rap, in order to restore a natural appearance and limit access to the beach. (King County's 1996/1997 Beach Assessment, King County website - www.metrokc.gov.)

In recent years local citizens, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the city of Burien have joined forces to help revive the Park's delicate forest cycle. The NRCS provided the City with financial and technical aid through the Natural Resources Stewardship Network for the Seahurst Park Reforestation Project, a multi-year effort to plant seedlings of native trees in order to return natural succession to the Seahurst Park forest.

Due to heavy logging and other human activities before the creation of the park, the natural life cycle of its trees was altered. Mature red alder and big leaf maple dominate the park, rather than evergreens such as Douglas fir, western hemlock and western red cedar. To help nature reach the normal succession of these species, the Burien Parks Department developed the Seahurst Park Reforestation Project.

Throughout the winter of 2002, local groups and Adopt-A-Park volunteers cleared away brush and planted native trees. The National Tree Trust and Puget Sound Energy provided additional financial help. ("Reviving the Forest in Seahurst Park")

In the winter of 2004-2005, the Seahurst Park shoreline restoration project was begun. This was the first effort to be funded under the Puget Sound and Adjacent Waters Restoration program, which received its first congressional appropriation in 2003. State congressional delegates Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell and Jim McDermott helped secure the federal funding, which covered about 80% of the project's estimated cost of \$1.5 million. The city of Burien was to spend \$286,000 for the two-month-long project.

The purpose of the project was to replace a 1,000-foot section of the gabion seawall--"a pile of metal-meshed rock baskets"--with a more gradual and natural slope, thus restoring the sandy, small-gravel beach needed by smelt and other forage fish to grow and become a key food source for salmon.

The Army Corps of Engineers used a barge instead of trucks to transport the dismantled seawall and bring in the materials needed to restore the shoreline. On December 7, 2004, engineers, Burien city officials, environmentalists, neighbors and congressional delegates took part in a kickoff ceremony which included the symbolic release of crabs, whelks and small fish to represent the beach's rejuvenation.

Since the seawall was built in 1972, much had been learned about shoreline and habitat protection. As waves eroded the wall, its 10-pound rocks had broken apart on the beach, diminishing the necessary spawning conditions for smelt, sand lance and other forage fish on which salmon feed. Removing the seawall and grading the shoreline would also improve a key migratory corridor for juvenile chinook salmon., fish biologists said. The Army Corps planned to bring in 15,000 tons of sand and gravel to supplement and regrade the beach, helping to replenish eelgrass and other critical habitat for the salmon food chain. ("Seahurst Park's sea wall is a-tumbling down," Seattle P.I., December 8, 2004)

As of the summer of 2006, the first phase of this work was well underway, including removal of the south seawall, beach restoration and marine riparian plantings. In 2002 Burien had adopted the Seahurst Park Master Plan, which called for over \$11 million in renovation and restoration to return the park to its originally intended use, and to reverse environmental degradation. (Trail Notes, Newsletter of Volunteers for Outdoor Washington, Summer 2006)

In 2004 a science education program, *Citizen Science*, was brought to Seahurst Park. The program is designed to collect long-term scientific data on the nearshore habitat and wildlife of Seattle-area marine reserves and Seahurst Park. The project bridges the gap between the need for habitat protection and public involvement in wildlife management. The program utilizes trained students from Tyee, West Seattle and other high schools, and from the Highline District's OSC/Marine Tech Program.

After a pilot year in 2004 at Seahurst Park with the City of Burien, Environmental Science Center and the Highline School District, the program expanded to Seattle in 2005. These "citizen scientists"--local high school students and teachers, assisted by trained adult volunteers--collected data on selected species of marine flora and fauna, and on beach characteristics such as slope, substrate and habitat type; conducted biodiversity surveys of over 80 species of invertebrates, fish, seaweeds and eelgrass; and established a system of managing and sharing data with other government and scientific entities.